



Registered Charity No. SC026072

Chair's Report for 2024-25

As I reflect on the past year, the main theme that comes to mind is teamwork. 2024/25 has been an extremely active and successful year which couldn't have happened without everyone pulling together and I am truly grateful for the support given by the committee. Every single member, no matter how new to the charity, has brought a valuable contribution. This report is a long one to make sure all the hard work over the year is recognised – and still there will be things missed out!

One of our strengths as a charity is that our constitutional membership only lasts for 5 years, ensuring that fresh enthusiasm, skills and ideas are brought in as new volunteers join. But with this also comes the risk of the knowledge base of the charity being lost, and valuable time wasted as people get to grips with how the charity operates. As Chair, I have been very keen to ensure we continue to build upon the good work done by others before us, to solidify our practises into modern, futureproof, operations that are easy to hand on to the trustees that follow. It is also a personal priority to look after our volunteers by ensuring we meet our regulatory obligations, use best practise, use their time effectively and provide training and support where needed. My two years as Chair have been about this, whilst ensuring the core function of making grants to children and young people continues and is strengthened.

Jane Keir, who had contributed so much in driving forward some of the modernisation in 2023/24, retired in September. Mo Mathieson also retired after four years, including a sterling two years as requests officer. We thank them both very much for their time and ideas, which have continued to influence us. We welcomed four new members, Colin McCondichie in June, Gill Black in December, Katharine Cotter in April and Kelly Haigh who will join at the June meeting. Between them they have wonderful experience to offer, from relevant practise working with children and families, to IT skills and general business experience and of course, a keen interest in supporting our local children. This is a very strong committee who work well together already, even with so many new members in a short time, and we are full for the first time in years with 12 members.

The regulatory requirements placed on a charity are ever more complex, and we have found that having people in post for longer is very beneficial. A one-year tenure in an office bearing role now seems to be less than ideal. For this reason, we will be updating the constitution at this meeting to allow for 6 years as a trustee instead of 5, and adding a Vice Chair role to help spread the workload.

Last year we began to switch our IT systems, and I am pleased to say that the process is almost complete. This has transformed our ability to collaborate on documentation, with all committee members having access to appropriate IT packages and has really underpinned our key activities in communicating with external organisations. It has massively improved the way our data is stored and accessed and has given us state of the art data security, achieving the aims set out last year. Rolling it out on a training day kindly hosted by Linda couldn't have worked without the IT capabilities of Jemma. She quietly supports all the IT efforts and has been a brilliant sounding board throughout. We have been very fortunate to receive further support on our IT systems from Grant McGregor, a contact of Katharine's who will complete the setup for us and then hand us over to a local team for our ongoing needs. This is a very generous offer from Grant McGregor and their specialist skills are very much appreciated.

The most brilliant example of how the IT system has helped us work as a team comes from a grant application made by Penny Hardie, our Treasurer, to Spifox, a fundraising charity that makes grants to other charities directly helping children in Scotland. We were invited to be a main speaker at their Christmas lunch in Edinburgh, attended by 1400 people, and needed a newsletter for the tables, a powerpoint presentation, a reel to say thank you and business cards within only a couple of weeks. It's amazing how everyone pulled together to make this happen – we got a huge donation of £19,800 from Spifox for our project 'Eradicating bed poverty in the Borders' and a new committee member, Katharine, who was inspired to join us, as Penny did such a fantastic job on the day!

As new starters themselves last year, Susan and Jemma were well-placed to update and improve the new starter information pack. With changes in charity law coming into force in 2025 and prompted by Katharine's approach as a stranger to us, Wendy, Nancy and myself then used that base to develop a formal process for recruiting, enrolling and inducting new members.

Continuing the theme of solidifying, the requests process has received intense focus. Vicki as Requests Officer has developed excellent relationships with our referrers, making great efforts to ensure all the necessary information can be presented at the monthly meetings. The committee agreed a documented framework for our main types of requests, which has improved clarity for the Requests Officer role and in consistent decision making at the

monthly meetings. This, with the new handbook, will make the process smoother when Vicki steps down after a third and final year. Vicki has worked tirelessly in her role and in supporting me in the development of these processes, for which she deserves huge thanks.

Our GDPR policies had a major overhaul last year, but new charity regulations and the switch to a new IT system has necessitated another review, which was completed last month.

Another important piece of work was to update the website – building on the idea of a separate development group outwith the monthly meetings, Wendy brought us all together, working in pairs to achieve this. There are still some pages to improve over the coming months, but with input from everyone it already reflects our current position.

The committee have been very active in the wider community this year. Penny H gave a talk to Galashiels Inner Wheel, Linda and Vicki to Kelso Art Group, and they also spent a morning with Duns Primary School supporting their P5/6/7's initiative on poverty and community services. A few of us helped at Cindy Webster's annual gorgonzola event, Vicki giving a talk about BCC to a packed village hall. Huge thanks to Cindy, who has been supporting BCC for many years. Once again, we supported the Youth Philanthropy Initiative, with pupils representing BCC at the final at Selkirk High School. It is wonderful to see young people taking the time to learn about the issues some of their peers face, and how BCC can help. We were very impressed with how the finalists had grasped this. Nancy and Susan had a really interesting visit with Berwickshire Swap, learning about what they offer so that we can support each other.

Susan also joined BCC as members of Borders Community Action – a great source of help, support, training and networking for the third sector in the Borders. They were able to help with GDPR training and advice on regulations around PVG's and moneys being donated. This will continue to be a valuable resource for the charity.

Linda, Jemma, Vicki and myself completed the Edinburgh Kilt Walk of 21 miles in September, raising a total of £1368, with a social media campaign working really well to raise awareness of the charity. Linda, Jemma and Susan have made great efforts with our social media this year, which no doubt is vital in keeping the profile of the charity in focus.

We are very fortunate in continuing to benefit from donations, big and small, many of which are regular, such as the Sheriffs court tea room in Selkirk and Caddonfoot Church. A new local venture, Cedar Hus mobile saunas, has chosen to support BCC on an ongoing basis from this year. We would also like to sincerely thank Border Events Centre and ASDA in Galashiels for allowing us to use their meeting rooms at zero cost. It should not be

forgotten that all of the committee are volunteers who do not claim expenses, and that our total costs continue to run at about 1% of donations. Nancy, our secretary, does a fantastic job in making sure thanks are sent to everyone, no matter the size of the donation.

Our Treasurer Penny Hardie has also been highly successful in raising funds through grant applications, not only with Spifox but other major funds. Not only has she done a fantastic job as Treasurer, but she has also been a great support in all the development work we've undertaken. Her report gives the detail and so I will just say here that the charity is in a secure financial position, with a surplus on the year that sees us well-placed to continue to assist as many local children as possible, so long as funds continue to come in. I have often referred to it as a 'magic porridge pot' – we try very hard to spend the funds as they come in! This year we processed 180 applications, covering a total of 274 children, an approximately 17% increase in the number of applications from last year, which has also resulted in an increased spend of about £20,000 in comparison to 23/24. Urgent funds were needed in 4% of cases; these reached the children within a few days, which is another great strength of BCC. Approximately 50% of requests continue to be for simple items that most of us take for granted – things like a clean bed to sleep in, in a suitably furnished and carpeted room, and clothing that fits. BCC has been working with Chrysties of Hawick for over 20 years, who undertake philanthropic work to support our families in supplying these basics. This year we deepened our relationship with them, streamlining the application and payment processes, to the benefit of ourselves and the professionals working so hard to help. We thank Chrysties for their ongoing efforts.

There have also been many requests for specialist equipment not provided by the NHS, to enable children with disabilities to lead more fulfilling lives with their families.

Occupational therapists within the NHS have previously had difficulty in accessing BCC funding because of how their financial systems work. This year, we set up a system to pay directly to suppliers for the specialist equipment they need for the children they work with, which should enable more children to benefit.

Support for children's mental health issues through therapy in various forms – art, music, sport and counselling – has been provided. We were able to fund 36 children to join their school trip, when they otherwise wouldn't have been included with their peers in this important opportunity. These are some examples of how we meet our aims in improving children's lives, but there are many more. Everyone contributes to our discussions and input from newer members with relevant experience with families, like Colin and Gill, are already proving valuable.

We finish 2024/25 in a strong position to attract both donations and new committee members going forward. The atmosphere is inclusive, with everyone invested. More requests are coming in, and we do have the funds to allow us to reach more children who could benefit from our support. The process of strengthening the foundations of the charity for the future is well underway. I hand over to Linda Runciman as Chair and Wendy Copeland as Vice Chair, confident that they will carry the charity forward excellently from their personal drive. They will be supported by a great team of office bearers in Nancy, Vicki and Penny H, whose experience will be of real benefit to them, as this will be the third year in office for them all. With this hard-working, engaged committee, the charity will continue to make great progress.

With a real sense of satisfaction in having played my part in its history, I would encourage anyone who has a passion for helping local children to consider giving their time to BCC. It has been one of the best things I have done!

Penny

Penny Stratford

Chair 2023-2025

Committee: Nancy Anderson (Secretary), Gill Black, Wendy Copeland, Katharine Cotter, Susan Dow, Kelly Haigh, Penny Hardie (Treasurer), Colin McCondichie, Linda Runciman, Vicki Wauchope (Requests Officer), Jemma Wood.